

Commissioner Deborah A. Gist's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, August 19, 2011

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Action Item Calendar

August 31: Certification-renewal deadline
September 2: Deadline for Education Leadership Council nominations
September 16: Deadline for nominations for Rhode Island Teacher of the Year
September 23: Erate funding forms due
November 15: Deadline for final selections of District Teachers of the Year

Notes from Commissioner Gist:

1. Streamlined process for Teacher of the Year applications to be posted on RIDE Web site

It was great to get a chance to speak with you at your General Membership Meeting on Wednesday. I enjoyed sharing with you some of the highlights of the past school year and taking a moment to look ahead at some of the work we will be taking on together in the coming year. At the end of my remarks, I asked your support in three areas: helping to ensure that our principals have the capacity to administer evaluations, helping all educators to understand the revised certification procedures that the Regents will consider, and making sure we have a 2012 Teacher of the Year for every district in Rhode Island.

As I noted in last week's Field Memo, I am extending the deadline for selection of 2012 District Teachers of the Year to November 15. District Teachers of the Year selected after the September 16 deadline will not be candidates for Rhode Island Teacher of the Year; however, we will honor all Teachers of the Year during our annual Celebration of Educator Excellence in the spring. We want every district to be able to join this wonderful celebration to honor educators from across the whole state!

If you cannot meet the September 16 deadline, I encourage you to use a streamlined application process, including the teachers' resumes, letters of reference, evaluations (if available in your schools) and any other material you think may be relevant. I also encourage you to set up a broadly representative committee to make the award selection. We will post a sample streamlined application on our Web site, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/Recognition/default.aspx>

Please feel free to get back to me if you have any questions about the Teacher of the Year program. I hope to see a 2012 Teacher of the Year from every district!

2. RIDE responds to news report about increase in consultant costs

Perhaps you saw a story that appeared on Monday morning in one of the news outlets regarding RIDE expenditures on consultants:

Commissioner Gist's budget: Consultants cash in

<http://www.golocalprov.com/news/ride-budget/>

I believe that the story was very unfair and unbalanced and that it presents a completely erroneous picture of how and why RIDE uses consultants. Here is the complete statement I provided to golocalprov.com for their use in this story:

I take very seriously my responsibility as a steward of taxpayer dollars. An essential part of our strategic plan for transforming education in Rhode Island is our commitment to investing our resources wisely. We are accountable for every dollar we spend on the taxpayers' behalf, and we must be sure that all of our expenditures are efficient, effective, and in the best interest of our students.

The R.I. Department of Education is a relatively small agency, yet we are responsible for the oversight of the entire system of public education in Rhode Island, in which taxpayers invest about \$2 billion annually in federal, state, and local funds. Our responsibilities include the oversight of teacher quality and certification, state assessments, development of curriculum and academic standards, student health and safety, school nutrition, career-technical education, adult education, students with disabilities, English-language learners, innovative schools and programs, administration of all federal grants, adjudication of legal disputes, and management of all state aid to education – to cite just some major examples.

Data we have provided to golocalprov.com show that our expenditure of state funds on consultants and vendors declined by about 25 percent over the past four years. Our budget for consultants and vendors varies from year to year, depending on need – which is one of the advantages of hiring outside help as and when required.

Over the past two years, we have worked very hard to bring federal grants to Rhode Island, and we have attained incredible success that should make all Rhode Islanders proud. We have brought federal funds to Rhode Island in the form of School Improvement Grants, a Longitudinal Data System Grant, a Charter School Program Grant, and of course the highly competitive \$75-million Race to the Top grant. As a result of these and other grant awards, our expenditures from all funds (including federal) doubled last year to about \$25 million for consultants and vendors.

We hire consultants, or vendors, to help with many RIDE initiatives and projects, and we do so for several reasons.

Much of our work involves short-term or time-limited projects. Our belief is that it would be unwise to add full-time (or part-time) employees to the state payroll for time-limited projects. The Race to the Top initiative is a great example. At the conclusion of the four-year grant, the work will be complete and the contracts with outside vendors will expire.

Other work involves specialized knowledge, skills, or expertise far beyond our capacity at RIDE. For example, as part of our work toward improving mathematics achievement across the state, we have focused on a complete review of the mathematics curriculum in every district and on intensive training in mathematics instruction statewide. We have

hired a team of experts to work with our schools and districts on this intensive curriculum review, which falls outside of our expertise. Similarly, we hire experts for such specialized tasks and responsibilities as managing our longitudinal data system, developing and maintaining our on-line reports (InfoWorks Live) for all schools and districts, managing the inter-district transportation system, working with districts to provide induction and orientation for new teachers, and providing translation services – to list just a few examples.

Finally, we follow all proper state procedures regarding competitive bidding and proposal review for every contract we award. All of our contracts – in fact, all work that this agency undertakes – have timelines, milestones, goals, and deliverables. We monitor each contract closely to ensure that we spend taxpayer dollars wisely. Ultimately, I am responsible for all contracts that RIDE awards, and I expect and encourage Rhode Islanders to hold me accountable for results. I welcome that responsibility.

3. National Journal blog looks at anti-bullying efforts

I am very proud of the efforts all of us in Rhode Island – our partners in the General Assembly, the Board of Regents, the RIDE staff, and educators in every district – have made to keep all of our students safe and to make our schools welcoming and inspiring places for teaching and learning. As a contributor to the National Journal Education blog, I posted an item this week highlighting the leadership role Rhode Island educators have taken in working directly with students to keep our schools free from bullying. My post is available here:

Listening to students about bullying (National Journal Experts Blog)

<http://education.nationaljournal.com/2011/08/worried-about-bullying-ask-the.php#2046626>

Thank you for your partnership on this important issue. I am proud that Rhode Island is a national leader when it comes to the safety of our students.

4. Ideas welcomed on teacher autonomy

I recently had a good meeting with a group of dedicated teachers, and our discussion led us to the topic of teacher autonomy. I shared my thoughts on this topic with the teachers, and I want to share with you some of the key points from our discussion.

I strongly believe that teacher autonomy is an important part of our efforts to ensure educator excellence, and teacher autonomy is also closely connected to our work on accountability and management. In my view, the role of the state should be to make clear to the districts what we need to do to transform education – but not how we need to do this work. The state should not be overly prescriptive; we should provide districts with the autonomy to make their own thoughtful decisions about how to carry out the work. I would like to see the same principle applied at every level – from LEA to school, from principal to teacher.

The goal is not to tell teachers how to do their work and then hold them accountable for how they do it. We need to give teachers autonomy over their work and the flexibility to do what

works best – within the guidelines that we set at the state, district, and school levels. We are applying this principle – focusing on outcomes rather than on inputs – in the proposed redesign of educator certifications, which we are presenting to the Board of Regents. Under the proposed system, we will renew certification based on the effective performance of educators (measured primarily by evidence of student growth and achievement), not by how many courses, programs, projects, or credits the educators have completed.

If you have any thoughts or ideas you would like to share with me on the subject of teacher autonomy and on accountability across the education spectrum, I would love to hear from you.

5. Race to the Top anniversary news conference scheduled for Wednesday

Wednesday (August 24) marks a historic day for Rhode Island education: the first anniversary of the day we won Race to the Top. We will mark the date by holding a news conference, at 10:30 a.m., at the Rhode Island Foundation (1 Union Station, Providence). We'll take this opportunity to look back on all the progress we have made during Year One of Race to the Top and to look ahead at some of the initiatives we will begin during the second year of the grant. From developing the application to drafting the budgets and Scopes of Work to implementing the initial phases of the proposal, so much of our success with Race to the Top has been because of your hard work and your ongoing commitment to transforming education. If your schedule permits, please feel free to stop by on Wednesday to join us as this wonderful occasion.

From RIDE:

6. Deadline extended for Qualified Zone Academy Bond applications

Please see this note from our Office of Statewide Efficiencies:

Qualified Zone Academy Bonds (QZABs) allow eligible districts the opportunity to obtain interest-free bonds for rehabilitating or repairing schools, providing equipment, developing course materials, or training teachers. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 recently expanded the bonding authority allowed for QZAB, and Rhode Island has been allocated \$1,093,000 of QZAB issuance authority for calendar year 2011 (bonds issued by December 31, 2013). To be eligible, districts must have at least 35 percent of their students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches and the district must enter into a public-private partnership with a private entity willing to contribute an amount not less than 10 percent of the capital. For detailed information, a list of eligible districts, and an application packet, visit:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Finance/Funding/construction/default.aspx>

The application deadline has been extended to **October 3**.

7. Brochure for students on Diploma System available from RIDE

Please see this message from our Office of Multiple Pathways:

RIDE has prepared a student brochure with information about the diploma requirements for the Class of 2014. These brochures are for your use at freshmen orientations and to share with your 10th graders. The brochure outlines the basic diploma requirements, provides short descriptions of available supports and opportunities, and notes a few things that students can do to meet the new requirements. RIDE personnel are working to deliver the brochures to each LEA in time for freshmen orientation or before the first day of school. If you have not already heard from RIDE about delivery, you will be hearing from someone from the Office of Multiple Pathways early next week to set up a convenient time to drop off the brochures at your central office.

Additionally, RIDE is mailing to every superintendent and principal a packet with several informational documents supporting implementation of the secondary regulations. These packets include the student brochure, parent letters in three languages, a copy of the guidance, and FAQs. RIDE has printed copies of the letters and will print more brochures as requested. Please send requests for printed materials to Lauren McCarthy (lauren.mccarthy@ride.ri.gov). All of these documents are available online, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/HighSchoolReform/>.

Please contact Karsten Cash (karsten.cash@ride.ri.gov) with any questions.

8. RIDE asks districts to provide names of all beginning teachers

Please see this notice from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

One of the visionary pieces of our Race-to-the-Top grant is a statewide induction program for every first-year teacher. RIDE has hired an exceptional team of induction coaches to support this important work, and the coaches have already started professional development to deepen their coaching skills and begin their thinking on optimal ways to support beginning educators in the state. At present, RIDE has received the names of 77 first-year teachers who will be supported by our talented induction coaches. We are confident that there are more than 77 first-year teachers who will be working in districts across the state, and we need your assistance in identifying the rest. These beginning teachers have a remarkable opportunity to have the early support of an induction coach who can assist them in setting up their classroom, developing classroom procedures and structures, designing initial lesson plans, and addressing the range of questions that a first-year teacher has as he or she enters the profession.

Please urge your Human Resources director to let RIDE know of any first-year teachers who have been hired in your district. This can be accomplished by going to the following link:

<https://sites.google.com/site/riinduction/district-data-entry>.

If you need assistance entering this information, please contact Donna Okrasinski, RTTT Educator Quality, donna.okrasinski@ride.ri.gov.

As always, if you have any questions or feedback, do not hesitate to contact Hilda or Donna:

Hilda Potrzeba, at hilda.potrzeba@ride.ri.gov or 222-8891
Donna Okrasinski, at donna.okrasinski@ride.ri.gov or 222-8982

Thank you for your support and assistance in accelerating the performance of new teachers to enhance student achievement.

9. ERate funding forms due September 23 – Response Required

Please see the following notice from our Division of Fiscal Integrity and Efficiencies:

The Rhode Island Telecommunications Educational Access Fund (RITEAF) forms have been updated based on feedback from throughout the year. These forms are required for RIDE to apply for ERate funding on behalf of the consortium of schools and libraries in Rhode Island receiving RITEAF telecommunications lines. These forms must be returned no later than **September 23** in order for RIDE to file the appropriate ERate paperwork on your behalf and for your schools to receive line allocations and grant awards for the 2012-13 school year.

The updated forms are located at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Instruction/intech/RITEAF/RITEAF3applying.aspx>.

Frequently asked questions can be found on the RIDE Web site as well as in the forms and accompanying paperwork. Technology directors and those responsible for ERate paperwork should be made aware of the updates and due dates. Questions can be directed to Karen Cooper (karen.cooper@ride.ri.gov).

Also, remember to log into eRIDE and update the URL that points to your district's technology plan. Technology plans are used by many RIDE staff and must be kept current.

10. Workshops on the R.I. Alternate Assessment to be held next week

Please see this reminder from our Office of Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum:

The 2011-12 RIAA Administrators Workshops are the annual workshop for principals, special-education directors, and district test administrators to prepare for the administration of the R.I. Alternate Assessment (RIAA) for the 2011-12 school year. Topics covered will include: a general overview of the RIAA process, what to look for before signing-off on data folios, review of data from 2010-11, and updates on the GSEG alternate assessment, which will begin development soon.

There will be two sessions:

- Tuesday (August 23), at the URI Center for Biological Sciences, Kingston Campus. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m., with the presentation running from 9 a.m. - noon.
- Thursday (August 25), at the Northern Rhode Island Collaborative, 640 George Washington Highway, Suite 200, Lincoln. Registration begins at 12:30 p.m., with the presentation running from 1 – 4 p.m.

Registration is available through the workshop calendar on the RIDE Web site, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/applications/ridecalendar.aspx>

RIDE will send this reminder to principals and special-education directors.

11. Rhode Island Model Teacher Guide, back-to-school toolkits now available

Please see this notice from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

Our educator evaluation team has created a Teacher Guidebook that includes all of the information in the Rhode Island Model, *Guide to Evaluating Building Administrators and Teachers*, that pertains to a teacher's evaluation. The Teacher Guidebook can be downloaded here:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/EducatorEvaluation/Guides.aspx>

Please note that we have made this Guidebook a “smart” document that will allow your teachers and other educators to easily access the information through an interactive format.

As of today, you will also be able to download the first toolkit of materials to lead back-to-school sessions with teachers about the Rhode Island Model Educator Evaluation System. These sessions are fully customizable to meet principals' needs and timeframes.

The first Meeting in Box (Staff Meeting #1) can be implemented in one long session or broken into two sessions (depending on the available time). Topics covered in Session #1 include everything that teachers need to learn to prepare for the first evaluation conference of the year: an overview of the model, Professional Practice and Responsibilities Rubrics, self-assessments, Professional Growth Goals, Student Learning Objectives, and Beginning-of-Year Conferences.

To download the PowerPoint (with detailed presenter's notes), Principals' Agenda, and handouts, please visit our Training Resources page:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/EducatorEvaluation/Training.aspx>

12. RIDE accepting applications for evaluation ISPs

Please see this notice from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

We remain committed to developing a cadre of Evaluation Intermediary Service Providers (ISPs) to provide on-the-ground support to you. and we are currently still recruiting applicants. To apply for an Evaluation ISP position, applicants have two distinct options:

Option 1: Interested candidate can apply to RIDE directly for an Evaluation ISP position.

Option2: Current district employees who are interested in the Evaluation ISP position can be released from their district for two years, with their superintendent's approval, so that they can be trained to provide support to districts across the state (similar to the model for Induction Coaches). Districts can choose to release a teacher or administrator to serve as an Evaluation ISP for either 90 days each year or for the entire year.

For additional information about the Evaluation ISP position and the application packet, please visit our Announcements page:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/EducatorEvaluation/EdEvalAnnounce.aspx>

13. Sessions still open for Module 1, Module 2 training for evaluators

Please see this notice from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

At a recent Module 1 training session for teacher evaluators, a principal said, "This is reflective of what we know about great teaching." Principals also talked about how they need to communicate and work with their teachers in order to implement the Rhode Island Model effectively. It was such a pleasure to see so many dedicated and highly motivated leaders.

To date, hundreds of educators have attended Module 1 for teacher evaluators. A limited number of sessions remain for Module 1 for teacher evaluators and Module 1 for building administrator evaluators, so please make sure that all of your evaluators register.

Module 2 for teacher evaluators begins on Monday, and these sessions will run through September 29. Module 2 for teacher evaluators will prepare participants to lead effective Beginning-of-Year Conferences.

From the U.S. Department of Education:

14. Secretaries Duncan, Sebelius urge schools to help enroll eligible students for health-insurance coverage

Please see the following letter, which Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius sent last week to all governors:

We are writing to enlist your help in an unprecedented initiative to find and enroll an estimated 4.3-million uninsured children who are currently eligible for Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). These children represent a large majority of the uninsured children in the U.S., and they are missing out on health coverage that is available to them today.

Too often, children who are uninsured encounter obstacles that prevent them from becoming fully engaged in the classroom, on the playing field, and in other extracurricular activities - preventing them from getting the most out of their education. That's why the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) are working together to help enroll these eligible children through the Connecting Kids to Coverage Challenge. This initiative, led by HHS, calls on leaders at every level of government and in the private sector to help enroll all eligible, uninsured children in Medicaid and CHIP and keep them covered for as long as they qualify. We urge you to join us and to encourage your schools to participate in this effort.

A forthcoming study by the Urban Institute indicates that outreach and enrollment efforts do increase the percentage of children who enroll in health coverage. Between 2008 and 2009, the number of children eligible for Medicaid and CHIP increased by 2 million to 3 million, due to difficult economic times and state eligibility expansions. Despite this increase in eligibility, in part due to outreach and enrollment efforts, the total number of eligible but uninsured children declined to 4.3 million in 2009, which was lower than the 4.7-million children found to be eligible but uninsured in 2008. The participation of children in Medicaid and CHIP increased from 82 percent in 2008 to 85 percent in 2009 nationally.

Efforts to streamline Medicaid and CHIP enrollment and renewal procedures and to conduct effective outreach activities supported by the Children's Health Insurance Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA) have made a difference in extending children's coverage in the economic downturn. These efforts, with continued support from CHIPRA, will continue to play a vital role in making progress toward the goal of enrolling all eligible children.

Schools play an essential role in reaching eligible children, from young children in preschool and Head Start to teens in high school. We urge you to undertake children's health-coverage outreach and enrollment activities when classes begin this fall. Below are some promising strategies you may wish to consider:

- *Use information on registration or emergency contact forms to identify children who may need health coverage.* Adding a question about whether a child has health insurance to the forms that every family completes can help identify uninsured children who may be eligible for Medicaid or CHIP. Families of such children can be notified about the programs and how to enroll. Note that any

personal information maintained by a school to which the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERP A) applies must only be used and disclosed in accordance with FERP A.

- *Enlist school athletic coaches to promote enrollment of eligible children in Medicaid and CHIP.* Coaches can provide information on health coverage programs to athletes and to the entire student body. They also can direct students to places within the school (for example, the school nurse- or school-based health clinic) or in the community where their families can apply. HHS has piloted a Coaches Campaign, called “Get Covered, Get in the Game,” in seven states (CO, FL, MD, NY, OH, OR, and WI), and we can help provide technical support and customized outreach materials if you wish to undertake a similar program.
- *Implement an “Express Lane Eligibility” process with the School Lunch Program.* Most children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals are likely to also qualify for Medicaid or CHIP. The “Express Lane Eligibility” option allows states to rely on eligibility findings from programs like School Lunch to jump-start Medicaid and CHIP eligibility determinations. Oregon and Louisiana, for example, are collaborating with their schools to implement Express Lane procedures. Note that any information must be used in accordance with Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Express Lane Eligibility guidance.

...Health coverage is essential to ensuring that children get the health-care services they need to grow and learn. The good news is that so many uninsured children do not need to wait for coverage because they are already eligible for Medicaid or CHIP. Your leadership can make a tremendous difference as we work together to meet the Connecting Kids to Coverage Challenge.

Please let me know if you need further information about the Connecting Kids to Coverage Challenge.

15. U.S. Department of Education provides back-to-school resources

Please see this notice from the U.S. Department of Education:

The federal government Web portal, USA.gov, has a Back to School landing page, with resources and tips to help students, parents, and educators prepare for the new school year. For more information, see:

http://www.usa.gov/Topics/Back_to_School.shtml

From other state agencies:

16. School flu clinics scheduled

Please see this notice from the Department of Health:

The school located vaccine clinic schedule is posted on HEALTH's Web site, at:

www.health.ri.gov.

(<http://www.health.ri.gov/flu/about/clinics/school/index.php>)

Please review the dates and times of your clinic(s).

On August 15, the Immunization Program did a mass mailing to parents who have children enrolled in grades 9-12 in public, charter, and state-run schools. Catholic and independent schools were included in this mailing if they submitted address information for their students. For schools that did not submit information, materials will be delivered to your school for direct distribution for your students. Included in this mailing was a cover sheet, influenza consent form, and vaccine information statements.

Every school nurse will receive a tool kit from The Wellness Company 4 to 5 weeks before his or her flu clinic is scheduled. It is designed to help you facilitate the most efficient operation of your school's vaccine clinic. It contains all of the necessary supplies and information. We have included posters for each student to take home via backpack with dates and times of your school clinic(s), instructions to help you best prepare for your clinic, templates for connect ed. Messages, and additional forms if needed. Schools hosting daytime clinics will also receive signs to be posted the day of the clinic and a pre-paid FedEx envelope to return consents to The Wellness Company.

At the end of the month, we will send a second mailing to the same high-school families, introducing them to our Vaccinate Before You Graduate Program.

We strongly encourage you to remind your students and their families of the dates and times of your school's clinic (through E-mail reminders, connect ed., newsletters, school calendars, bulletin boards, Web sites, etc.).

We look forward to working with you to ensure a safe and healthy school year! If you have any questions, please contact Kathey Marceau, at 222-4624 or Kathy.Marceau@health.ri.gov.

The Department of Health has sent this message to all school nurses. Please feel free to share this message with your principals.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Commissioner/fieldmemos/default.aspx>